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ABSTRACT

The Young Diplomats Program: Israeli School-to-School Exchange, sponsored by the New York City Board of Education and the United States Information Agency, was an international exchange involving 15 American and 15 Israeli high school students. Students from five specialized New York and five specialized Israeli high schools participated. Americans were matched with Israeli partners specializing in the same curricular area. The program included travel to the host country, living with the partner's family, attending the partner's school, and participation in career and cultural tours and seminars. Stated objectives for American participants included some knowledge of Israel's language and cultural institutions and favorable response by the Israeli student to the four-week introduction to American culture, education, and career opportunities. The program achieved its general goal, but implementation problems kept the program from realizing its full potential. The cooperating Israeli staff should be more aware of the program's objectives, procedures, and requirements, especially relating to visiting students' needs and that students hosting visitors should also visit the other country; and the American schools should help students make up work missed during foreign travel. (MSE)

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Evaluation Section Report
Robert Tobias, Administrator
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January, 1988

YOUNG DIPLOMATS PROGRAM: ISRAELI SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL EXCHANGE END-OF-YEAR REPORT 1986-87

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SUMMARY

The Young Diplomats Program: Israel School-to-School Exchange, sponsored by the New York City Board of Education and the United States Information Agency, was a foreign student exchange involving 15 American and 15 Israeli high school students. Students from five specialized New York City high schools and five specialized Israeli high schools participated. The participating New York City schools were: Stuyvesant, Brooklyn Technical, High School of Art and Design, John Bowne, and Fiorello LaGuardia.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

American students were matched with Israeli partners who specialized in the same curriculum area. The program for both American and Israeli students included traveling to the host country, living with the partner's family, attending the partner's school, and participating in career and cultural tours and seminars.

PROGRAM GOALS

The goals of the program were to improve students' mutual knowledge of the most country's culture and language, to contribute to international understanding, and to establish a future working relationship between the partner schools. The program's stated objectives were for American high school students to demonstrate some knowledge of Israel's language and cultural institutions; and for Israeli students to respond favorably to a four-week introduction to American culture, education, and career opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The program achieved its general goal of providing a positive experience for most of the American and Israeli participants. There was some evidence that participants increased their awareness of each other's culture by experiencing another educational system first hand, sharing in the cultural life of their peers, and participating in an extensive program of cultural and career tours. However, implementation problems kept the program from realizing its full potential. These included the fact that Israeli schools were not prepared for the American's visit and did not provide translators for the American students and that most of the Israeli hosts were not allowed to visit the United States.

Among the recommendations included in the report are the following:

- The cooperating Israeli staff should be made more aware of the objectives, procedures, and requirements of the program. In particular, principals of the participating schools should make arrangements to serve the visiting students' needs, including translating and tutoring if necessary.

- The American students were told that they would serve as hosts for their Israeli hosts. In the majority of cases this did not occur. Whenever possible, students hosting visiting students should also visit the foreign country.

- The U.S. schools should help American students make up work they missed during their foreign travel.

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Young Diplomats Program: Israel School-to-School Exchange, sponsored by the New York City Board of Education and the United States Information Agency, was a foreign student exchange program involving 15 American and 15 Israeli high school students from five specialized New York City and five specialized Israeli high schools, respectively. The New York City schools were Stuyvesant, Brooklyn Technical, High School of Art and Design, John Bowne, and Fiorello LaGuardia. Program administrators designed the program in an attempt to bring together American and Israeli students who shared the same academic and career interests. Students from each of the specialized New York City schools were paired with Israeli students attending high schools with similar specialties. The program for both American and Israeli students included traveling to the host country, living with a host family, attending the partner's school, and participating in career and cultural tours and seminars. The individual Israeli and American schools were responsible for arranging the visiting student's academic experiences, while the program of cultural and career tours was developed by program staff in each country. Students took career tours to sites related to their area of vocational and academic specialization, and cultural tours to sites of general interest. The general goals of the program were to improve students'

knowledge of each other's culture and language, to contribute to international understanding, and to establish a future working relationship between the partner schools.

U.S. school administrators selected candidates based on school record, teacher recommendations, visits to the student's home, a parent conference, an essay written by each student discussing why he or she wanted to participate in the program, and an interview with a Board of Education committee. Three students, between 16 and 18 years old, were selected from each of the five high schools. The American students expressed a wide variety of career interests: English, liberal arts, biology, politics, agriculture, business, architecture, commercial art, chemistry, math, computers, aviation, and music.

The Israeli students were chosen by Israeli officials and came from the Bosmat Technical High School in Haifa, The Women's International Zionist Organization School (WIZO) in Haifa, Kannot Agricultural School in Gedera, the Tel Aviv Conservatory of Music, and Daled High School in Tel-Aviv. The career interests of the Israeli students included agriculture, animal husbandry, architecture, photography, art, math, physics, chemistry, electronics, computers, and music.

Originally the Israeli students were to visit the United States in fall, 1986 and the Americans were to visit Israel in spring, 1987. However, because the Israelis needed more time to select students for the program, and because of unanticipated job demands on the Israeli program director, the schedule was

reversed, with the American students visiting Israel during November and the Israelis visiting the U.S. the following April. According to the program proposal, the American students were to host the Israeli students who had been their hosts in Israel. In fact, only six of the Israeli hosts could come to the United States. The other nine spots were filled by students who had not been hosts.

The program sought to achieve the following objectives:

- By the conclusion of the prehosting orientation period the American high school students will demonstrate growth in knowledge of Israel's language and cultural institutions in preparation for hosting Israeli high school students and visiting Israel.
- By the conclusion of the Israeli student visit, participating students will respond favorably to a four-week introduction to American culture, education and career opportunities as measured by a survey.
- During a pretrip orientation period 15 American high school students will attend orientation seminars, engage in independent study, and write a term paper to be evaluated by the school staff.

Because of the change in program schedule mentioned above, the first objective was dropped. Since the U.S. students went to Israel prior to hosting the Israelis, the program administrator decided that the prehosting orientation, because it had been intended to introduce students to Israeli culture, was unnecessary and, therefore, eliminated it.

SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The Office of Educational Assessment (O.E.A.) distributed questionnaires to American student participants and their

parents, and to Israeli students who came to the U.S. Twenty-six students completed questionnaires which addressed issues of program organization, students' experiences in the schools, and career and cultural tours and seminars. The parent questionnaire completed by 11 parents focused on preparation for hosting Israeli students. Five students responded to an additional student questionnaire, which was designed to assess the ways in which U.S. students increased their knowledge about Israeli life. In addition, the evaluator conducted an interview with the program director in June, 1987. This interview focused on the problems that arose in coordinating the program with Israel.

SCOPE OF THE REPORT

The evaluation report is divided into three parts. Chapter II describes and assesses the results of the American students' trip to Israel, Chapter III does the same for the Israeli students' trip to the U.S., and Chapter IV contains conclusions and recommendations based on the evaluation findings.

II. AMERICAN STUDENTS' VISIT TO ISRAEL

Fifteen American students visited Israel for three weeks during November, 1986. American students attended specialized Israeli high schools that reflected the specialty of their home schools: students from John Bowne went to the Kannot Agricultural School, those from Art and Design went to WIZO, those from Stuyvesant went to Daled High School, those from Brooklyn Technical went to Bosmat Technical High School, and those from LaGuardia went to the Tel Aviv Conservatory.

STUDENTS' PREPARATION FOR THE TRIP TO ISRAEL

Part of the American students preparation for their trip to Israel was to engage in a supervised independent study project regarding some aspect of Israel's culture, politics, or history. Because the trip to Israel took place in fall, 1986 rather than spring, 1987 as originally planned, it was difficult for students to complete an independent study project before leaving. However, five of the U.S. students stated that they were able to complete an independent project during the course of the school year. All of the projects focused on Israel's history and the history of Israeli-American relations. Two of the students wrote papers on the history of U.S.-Israeli relations. Of the five students who did independent study, three thought it was a

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END-OF-YEAR REPORT
1986-87

OEA Evaluation Report

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valuable part of their program experience.

AMERICAN STUDENT ORIENTATION

In Israel, American students were to receive a formal orientation at the Israeli high schools. Of 12 U.S. students responding, only seven said that they had received some type of orientation. Of the seven who had participated in an orientation, four students had negative reactions, complaining that the orientation was inadequate or that no orientation was provided. According to one student, "The school did not realize why I was there, or if they did know why, it was taken very lightly. They did not seem to know what their responsibilities were." This lack of preparation by the Israeli schools was a common theme expressed by a majority of the American students.

CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

Almost all of the students surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with their classroom experiences. Nearly all of the students stated that they did not have a regular schedule of classes. "There was no set program," said one student. "Each morning we set up a schedule, and during our stay each class was visited only once or twice." One student complained that most of the teachers at her school were not even initially aware of the exchange program and did not attempt to integrate the exchange students into classes. Three students commented that because they could not speak Hebrew they were unable to

participate in most classes. Seven of the students said that they were not provided with any assistance in translating class lectures, discussions or readings. Ten of the students stated that the classes they attended were of some interest, while two said the classes "did not at all" reflect their interests. Several students thought that the match-up process was not done well, and that they were paired with students who did not share their academic interests.

Several of the students said that it was their understanding that they would receive some type of tutoring so that they would not fall too far behind in school and that upon their return from Israel they would receive assistance in catching up. Only three of the students surveyed said adequate plans were made to assist them when they returned to New York.

PRESENTATIONS

In addition to attending classes each American student was to make a presentation regarding some aspect of American life for the Israeli students and staff. Six students delivered presentations, which were attended by an average of 30 Israeli students and staff. Some of the topics discussed included U.S. foreign affairs, drug problems in the U.S., schooling in the U.S., Hebrew culture in the U.S., and Americans' views of Israel and Israelis. Some students chose to focus on the program of study in their home school. For example, students from John Bowne, who were visiting the Kannot Agricultural High School,

discussed their school's agricultural program, and students from LaGuardia, visiting the Tel Aviv Conservatory of Music, discussed their school's unique program and location. Most students found the presentations enjoyable and informative. "I liked answering questions and was interested in what the Israelis would ask," said one student. "The Israeli students were very responsive and the presentations gave us a chance to meet new people." One student commented that it "would have been nice if more of these question and answer sessions had been arranged."

CAREER AND CULTURAL TOURS

The original proposal stated that the American students would take tours to sites of general cultural interest and sites reflecting their particular career interests. Students at four of the five schools stated that they took trips related to their career interests. Students from Brooklyn Tech, visiting the Bosmat Technical High School, went to the Technicon engineering school and to a chemistry lab. Students from Art and Design, attending WIZO, visited several sites of architectural interest: Jerusalem (including the viewing of a scale model of the city), Acco, and Ein Hod, all of which were rated very highly, and the DaDa Museum. Two students from John Bowne, attending the Kannot Agricultural Institute, stated that they took trips to an insemination plant, a cotton picking plant, and a kibbutz. The project director judged that Kannot had the most successful overall program and career tours. A student from LaGuardia,

attending the Tel Aviv Conservatory, cited several trips to concerts. Neither of the two students from Stuyvesant, attending Daled High School, cited any tours stressing careers or vocational interest.

GROWTH IN U.S. STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF ISRAELI CULTURE

The program objectives stated that students would learn more about the Israeli educational system, culture, language, and career opportunities. To evaluate this objective, students were asked to list the most important things that they learned about Israeli life as a result of their visit and their family's hosting of an Israeli student.

Several students were struck by differences between the educational systems of Israel and the United States. Some indicated that Israeli educational programs were more demanding, while others thought Israeli students and schools were more lax, with discipline and seriousness of purpose delayed until the military service that awaited students after high school. They noted that high prices and taxes kept the standard of living below that of the United States. Students were impressed by the importance of the common cultural background, Judaism, in the schools and in the country at-large.

Several students found that Israeli family relations were especially close, and that there was a great respect for parents. Some American students also suggested that there was more trust and freedom for teenagers in Israel. Many students saw

similarities between American and Israeli teenagers. For instance, both are, in the words of one student, "free spirited and love to have fun". However, there was also the recognition that Israeli teenagers were vulnerable to some of the same problems as their U.S. counterparts. Smoking was seen as a widespread problem and one American student saw the use of drugs and alcohol by Israeli youth as a last grasp at childhood before they must join the army. These observations suggest that American students did increase their knowledge of the Israeli educational system, culture, language, and career opportunities.

IV. ISRAELI STUDENTS' VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

The Israeli students visited the United States in April, 1987. A major shortcoming of the exchange program was that only two of the Israeli students who hosted the Americans were able to visit the U.S. The reason for this was that several of the principals in Israel decided that particular students who had hosted Americans could not afford the time away from their studies.

PREPARATION OF AMERICAN FAMILIES FOR HOSTING

Program staff conducted orientations for American parents and students. Since the parents of the American students were responsible for the care and supervision of the Israeli students, program staff thought it was important for them to receive an adequate orientation to the program. Eleven parents responded to questionnaires about their preparation. The parents' orientation activities included several group meetings with program staff, meetings with the school coordinator, the distribution of written materials from the Israeli consulate on social, political and economic issues, and the itinerary of events during the Israelis' visit. All but one of the parents described their preparation for hosting the Israeli students as adequate. A problem cited by one parent was that a biography of their visitor was not available in advance, making it difficult

to plan for the student's stay.

As discussed earlier, the Israeli students had originally been scheduled to visit the U.S. in fall 1986, before the Americans visited Israel. Because the schedule was reversed and the Americans went to Israel first, their cross-cultural experience served as their preparation for hosting. There was no formal assessment of students' knowledge of Israel's language and cultural institutions after their return and prior to their experience as hosts.

ISRAELI STUDENT ORIENTATION

All of the Israeli students received an orientation upon arriving in the U.S. The orientation covered academic work expectations, scheduling, tour activities, and their stay with the U.S. family. Generally, students thought that the orientation was best in describing the tour activities and poorest in making clear the academic work expectations at the school. Two students said the topic was not discussed at all, while four students rated the coverage of this topic as very poor.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

One of the program's goals was to have the Israeli students' classroom experiences reflect their academic and career interests. Although the Israelis were placed in schools that generally reflected their interests, only one student said that

the courses "very much" reflected his interests. Eight students said the courses "somewhat" reflected their interests, while four students said that the classes "did not at all" reflect their interests.

Eight of the students said that they participated in extracurricular activities, including mock trials, worked on the school newspaper, participated in a school show, and attended a performance of the high school all-city orchestra, a political meeting on racism in the schools, and a meeting of a temple youth group. All but one of these students said that the activities reflected their interests.

PRESENTATIONS

According to the proposal, the Israelis were supposed to give at least one formal presentation at the school regarding some aspect of Israeli culture. Seven students said that they made a presentation on Israeli life to an average of 25 students and staff. The Israeli students discussed such topics as the role of the army, the kibbutz, Israel's politics, education, authors and literature studied in school, and teenage life. In the proposal it was also suggested that a special one-day activity be held for the visiting student. Five of the Israelis said that such a special one-day activity was held for them, but that it was usually a field trip arranged for only those students participating in the program.

CAREER AND CULTURAL TOURS

According to the original proposal, students at each high school were to visit sites that were of general cultural interest, and sites that reflected their particular academic and vocational interest. Three days of cultural tours and sightseeing in New York City were proposed for the entire group of Israeli students and their American hosts. The activities that took place were in fact more extensive than planned. Sites visited included the Statue of Liberty, the World Trade Center, Chinatown, the United Nations, A.T.& T. "Infoquest", "The New York Experience", the New York Stock Exchange, and City Hall. Students also went on an excursion to Bear Mountain State Park and West Point, as well as a three-day trip to Washington, D.C. and the Pennsylvania Dutch Country. In Washington students visited the Bureau of Printing and Engraving, the Washington Monument, the Capitol, the Smithsonian and other cultural sites. The Israeli students rated all of the cultural tours very highly in terms of general interest.

The Israeli students were asked whether they took career tours. Only three students identified career tours--A.T.& T. Infoquest, the Maritime Academy, and the Museum of History and Technology in Washington. Other trips did not have a career focus. Based on these questionnaire responses, it seems that the program of career tours was less extensive than that described in the proposal.

SEMINARS

The proposal called for one seminar each week during the Israeli students' stay. These seminars were to include an orientation seminar, a career opportunity seminar, a higher education seminar, and an evaluation seminar. None of the surveyed students stated that they participated in any seminars, indicating that this objective was not met.

STAY WITH AMERICAN FAMILY

The Israeli students tended to be generally positive about their experiences in the American homes. However several of the American students were not happy with the match that had been made. "I don't think it was fair or productive not to have any sort of selection process for the Israeli students, and I was very unhappy with the student I was hosting. He didn't even go to the school that was matched with mine. I think I could have learned more if we were more compatible."

Host students also complained that several of the Israeli students did not participate in a manner that was in accordance with the stated goals of the exchange. They reported that these Israelis quickly became bored with attending school, and spent much of their time shopping or engaging in other activities that did not seem to be in the spirit of the program.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Young Diplomats Program provided a positive experience for most of the American and Israeli participants, although there were major problems in meeting several program objectives. Students experienced another educational system firsthand, shared in the cultural life of other students, and participated in an extensive program of cultural and career tours. However, there were several problems regarding program implementation. First, the participating schools in Israel were not prepared for the Americans' visit. For example, there were no provisions for translators, and many of the teachers seemed unaware of the program's existence before the students arrived in their classroom. This lack of preparation resulted in a disappointing school-based experience for American students. The second major problem was that most of the Israeli hosts were not able to visit the United States. The American students experienced this as a major disappointment and it hindered the solidification of ties between students who had been partners in Israel. The career tours and seminars for Israeli students that were supposed to be an important feature of the program were not implemented. Finally, no arrangements were made to help American students make up assignments they missed while in Israel.

Based on these findings the following recommendations are

made:

- The cooperating Israeli staff should be made more aware of the objectives, procedures, and requirements of the program. In particular, principals of the participating schools should insure that teachers make arrangements to serve the visiting students' needs, including making arrangements for translating and tutoring when necessary.

- The American students were told that they would serve as hosts for their Israeli hosts. In the majority of cases this did not occur. Whenever possible, students hosting visiting students should also visit the foreign country.

- The U.S. schools should help American students make up school work they missed during their foreign travel.